

Vol. 1 No. 6

August 1986

Atari ST User

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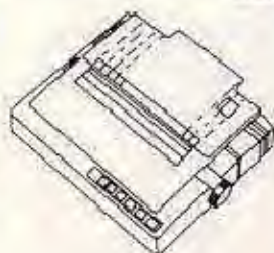
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Sales are hotting up with the sun



MIKE COWLEY reporting

AS I write this, the weather would be more appropriate to Marrakesh than dear old Manchester. Such is the surfeit of sunshine that we are no longer waking up to the sound of the birds coughing. It is heat wave time in Britain which even during July and August is as rare as seeing Albert Tatlock buying a round in a re-run of Coronation Street.

So what has all this got to do with computers in general and the ST in particular? Well traditionally when people's thoughts turn to basking on beaches in Margate or Majorca, it is the computer manufacturers who get brownd off through lost sales.

However it seems that Atari will be the exception this year with some skilful marketing ploys having dispensed with the annual summer time blues. The company here in the UK reports it has been doing "rather nicely, thank you very much" as a result of some adroit special deals.

By offering the 520STM in various packages with savings of up to £196, sales have in fact more than held their own during the mid year term. However a number of dealers are getting a little concerned about the knock-on effect once the prices rise again.

"Once people discover they've just missed out on a good deal, we'll find ourselves with a lot of unsold STs on our shelves for some time to come," muttered one.

Not that the Atari UK people go along with this. For they believe that people have become conditioned to short term promotions. And if they really want an ST they will buy one. Mind you, it will be interesting to see whether or not they do decide to extend that special offer period.

ONE other noticeable effect of the summer is the dearth of hard news – particularly on the computer front. As a result industry hacks become particularly prone to speculative rather than factual articles. "I think some of them sit on the loo looking up at the ceiling and then write whatever they imagine they see there", commented Atari UK boss Max Bambridge.

Currently the computer press is suggesting that Atari has in the pipeline machines capable of everything from tap dancing to unarmed combat.

The truth of the situation – according to Max Bambridge – is this: Atari is still well on target for the launch of the 2mb ST, the 2080 as it will presumably be called. This will be a true 32 bit machine which because of its incredible speed will be multi user, multi tasking.

It will run Unix, thanks to Atari signing a licensing agreement with AT & T in the USA. Existing ST users will almost certainly be offered the option to upgrade their machines to enjoy the same facility.

But what about the all important price? Atari is still hoping to be able to offer the basic 2mb model at less than £1,000. If this proves to be the case, Commodore's Amiga may as well take its bouncing ball home.

TECHNOLOGY, like Italian cabinets after the Second World War, tends to change so fast that any attempt at long range planning becomes extremely precarious. Just look at CD ROMs. Atari is just beginning to think very seriously of the implications of the compact disc facility for software for the ST.

Through its links with Warner Communications – the company from which Tramiel bought control of Atari – it could soon have a plentiful supply of CD ROMs. For Warners are currently building a plant to manufacture the revolutionary discs.

Now – according to The Sunday Times – compact discs may be about to become obsolete through a breakthrough in audio cassette technology known as digital audio tape.

It is not surprising to discover that it is the Japanese who are behind all this. DAT apparently aims to do for tape what compact discs have done for records – and threaten to do for software.

The data retrieval concept of the CD ROM is in itself revolutionary. This takes advantage of the sophisticated digital storage and retrieval technology developed for compact audio discs, using it for storing text or statistics.

In the CD interactive version proposed recently by Sony and Philips, the text can be intermingled with diagrams or with still or moving photographs. The CD ROM player, very similar in size and appearance to an audio compact disc player, can selectively take material off the disc and present it on the monitor screen.

Researchers suggest there will be a strong demand in the area of reference works, particularly where the CD ROM can provide audio effects and pictures. Currently CD ROM players can cost anywhere from \$700 to \$2200 but it is expected that prices will soon fall to \$500, then slump to around \$250.

Meanwhile, back in the DAT camp, its supporters are eagerly pointing out its potential for adaptation as a computer memory. With the advantage of small size, reasonable access time and a vast capacity of three billion characters of text – its storage potential is much greater than compact discs.

Still, the one consolation for compact disc manufacturers – and there are a lot of them about – is that there will be no further major developments in audio thanks to DAT until silicon chips can match its storage capacity and small size.

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ASS 520STM PACK 4: NORMAL PRICE: £1045.00
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The full GEM interface and graphics are supported and GEM software may be developed using windows, mice, menus and graphics.

Modula-2 is the logical development of the Pascal language (Pascal programmers will only take a few days to adjust). Modula-2/ST is a highly productive language producing fast, quality, 32-bit standalone code.

"A fine example of what a good language should be" and "a good way to move away from DRI's C" is the way Sol Guber describes Modula-2/ST in Atari User.

To fully exploit the potential of Modula-2/ST, we recommend a minimum configuration of 1MByte disk storage and the purchase of any of the recently published books on programming with GEM.

Modula-2/ST is available from the following distributors:

Greymatter, 4 Prigg Meadow, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7DF. Tel: 0364-53499 • Silica Distribution Ltd, 1-4 The Mews, Hatherley Road, Sidcup, Kent DA14 4DX. Tel: 01-309-1111 • Silicon Centre, 7 Antigua Street, Edinburgh, Scotland Tel: 031-557-4546 • Silicon Centre, Unit 16, Anderston Centre, Glasgow G2 7PH. Tel: 041-226-5346 • Software Express, 514.6 Alum Rock Road, Alum Rock, Birmingham B8 3HX, UK. Tel: 021-328-3585 • New World Computers, Bruunsbo 9, 8000 Aarhus Central, Denmark. Tel: 045-618-3130 • Micro-Applications, 13 Rue Sainte Cecile, 75009 Paris, France. Tel: 014-770-3244 • Eureka Data AS, Ostensjoveien 39B, N-0067 Oslo 6, Norway. Tel: 0472-6591/6522/6521 • Universal Electronics APL, PO Box 2154, Al Khobar 31952, Saudi Arabia. Tel: 09663-898-2081 • Sama Electronics AG, Bahnhofstrasse 7, 5400 Baden, Switzerland. Tel: 041-56-211422 • Atari (Benelux) BV, Hagenweg 7 B, Vianen, The Netherlands. Tel: 034-721844 • Pharma Pack International, Atari ST Software Dept, Van Gijnstraat 11, 2288 GA Rijswijk, The Netherlands. Tel: 070-906274 • Gerhard Knupe GmbH, Guntherstrasse 75, 46000 Dortmund 1, West Germany. Tel: 049-231-52803



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ST works out the cheapest

THIS month I'd thought I'd start by telling you that the ST is really the cheapest computer in the Atari range. Figure 1 shows a comparison of cost per k in pounds. I've taken the minimum system as the computer and one disc drive, but no monitor, since the 8 bit computers can use a TV while not all of the ST range have this ability.

The Atari 2080ST is likely to be announced and released before Christmas and will have 2mb of memory. I've estimated the cost of the 2080 at around £1,150 without a monitor. The difference in cost between the 2080 and 1040 is likely to be greater than that between the 1040 and 520 because 1mb chips are more expensive than the 256k chips used in the 520 and 1040.

As you can see from Figure 1, the ST range is cheapest, and getting cheaper all the time. In comparison, the Commodore 64 would have a price per k value of £6.25. You can work out the value yourself for other home computers.

Coding capers

I HAVE had several letters this last couple of months that suggest that some of you are losing your way among the ever increasing number of code numbers that Atari chooses to attach to their new products. As a help through this jungle, here is a rough and ready guide to the Atari ST range:

520ST: The original ST, now out of production. Dealers are likely to start discounting their remaining stocks.

520STM: The new base machine. Same as the 520ST, but with a modulator that allows the computer to be used with a television rather than a monitor. Both low and medium resolutions are allowed on a TV, but medium is almost unreadable. The original STs might be able to be upgraded to allow use with a TV, but only from third party manufacturers. Its £399 price tag does not include a disc drive, which is essential and therefore will add another £150 to the price.

1040STF: A 1mb ST with a built-in double sided disc drive (hence the F). No modulator means it

cannot be used with a TV. See the June issue of *Atari ST User* for the advantages of 1mb. Other than the larger memory, the 1040 offers nothing that the other models do not have. It will run all software written for the other models, but some software written for the 1040 (and the extra memory) will not run with only 512k. If you have your 512k ST upgraded to 1mb you will be able to run all 1040 software.

SF354: A single sided 360k disc drive (sometimes advertised as 500k, but only 360k is useable).

SF314: A double sided 720k disc drive (sometimes advertised as 1Mb or 1000k). Holds double the amount of the SF354, but can still read single sided discs. The SF354 cannot use discs from the SF314.

SM124: The ST high resolution black and white monitor. Only allows the use of high resolution mode.

SC1424: The colour monitor. Allows the use of low and medium modes. Only one monitor may be attached at any one time.

SH204: The soon to be available 20mb hard disc from Atari. To cost around £850.

The range is growing every day, but I'll try to keep you updated. If you see a + sign after the name of a 520ST or 520STM, it means that it has been upgraded to 1mb. You should note that the 1040ST cannot be upgraded beyond 1mb without drastic surgery.

★ ★ ★

I've had several requests for information regarding packages for the ST from people who want to do serious graphics work such as CAD (Computer aided design). Very few such packages are so far available for the ST, although



Send your Atari ST queries to:
ANDREW BENNETT,
Atari ST User,
Europa House,
68 Chester Road,
Hazel Grove,
Stockport
SK7 5NY.

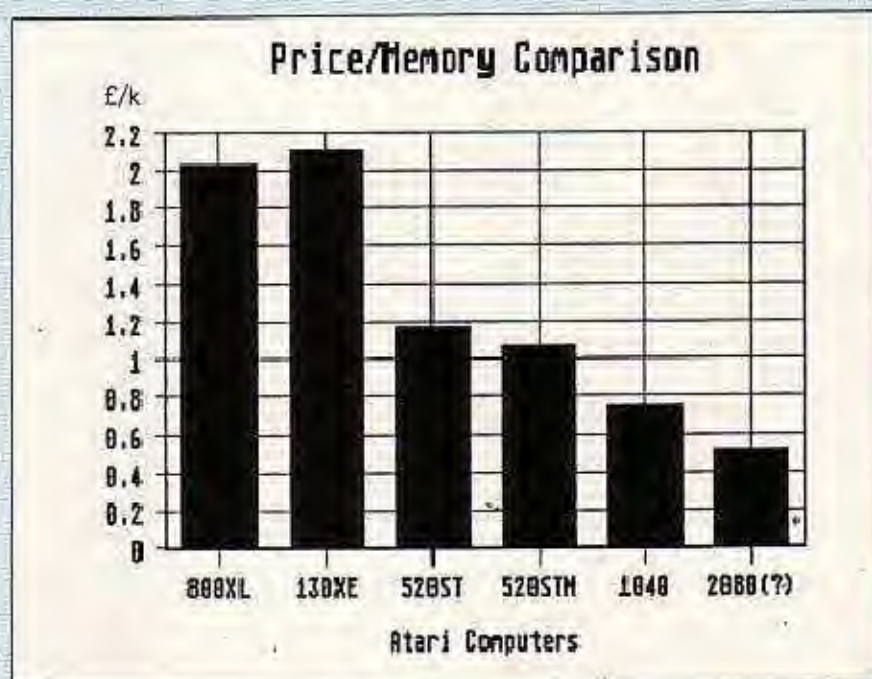


Figure 1



its graphics capabilities would seem to ideal for such uses.

The packages cover a vast range in price from DEGAS at £19.95 to Graphics Artist at £495. The only solution is to have a demonstration at your local dealer to see if a particular product will meet your requirements. One new program that may be of use to some of you is the latest from the keyboard of Tom Hudson, the author of Degas. It is called CAD 3D and will be marketed by Antic. It should be available from Silica Shop by the time that you read this.

★ ★ ★

I'm glad to see that so many of you agree with my comments about the BBC's Micro Live programme. From what I can tell, the BBC regards Micro Live as an innovation programme. They seem to have lost their way somewhat by sticking to the BBC Micro over most other micros.

Perhaps we ought to watch Channel 4's 4 Computer Buffs when it returns if we want to find

out more about the ST or indeed any other micro than the BBC!

● If you have been using a 520ST and you switch to the 1040 or 1mb of memory, you will notice that programs take very slightly longer to execute and that the 1040 takes longer to boot up than a 520. This is because the 68000 processor inside the ST has to do a little more work when a program loads into 1mb than in to 512k. The delay is nothing to worry about and is only really noticeable if you have been used to using a 512k ST.

● If you are desperate to use low resolution and have only a mono monitor, don't buy a colour monitor just yet. Several companies are working furiously to build modulator attachments for the ST, but they won't be cheap. I've heard mention of prices in the £75 range. Cheaper than a monitor perhaps, but you won't be able to use medium resolution because it is unreadable on a TV.

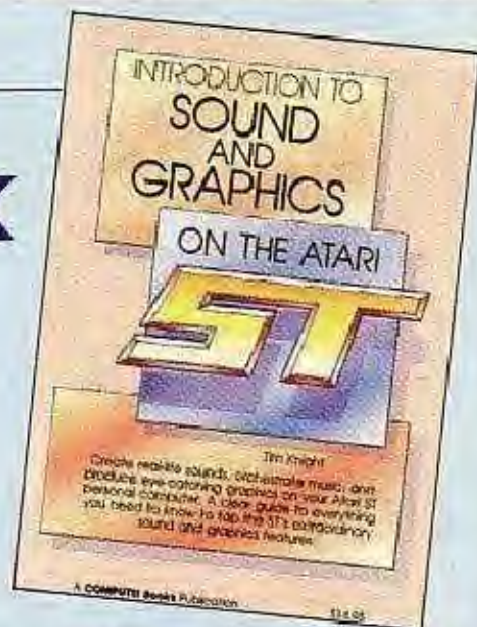
Useful book despite the padding

Introduction to Sound and Graphics on the Atari ST by Tim Knight (Compute! Books)

THE latest offering from Compute! – whose books have long been known to Atari users for their good quality and comprehensiveness – is for the ST.

Sound and Graphics covers Logo, Basic and Forth. In seven chapters and 194 pages it takes each language in turn, examining their use of sound and graphics.

The book begins with the now obligatory section on setting up the ST. This can only be of use to the reader who buys the book at the same time as his machine and finds that he needs more help than is given in the ST's manual to get his machine up and running.



The book then examines programming in Basic, Logo and Forth, giving plenty of clear examples and smoothing over some of the rougher patches in the Atari manuals. The chapter on advanced graphics gives information on various VDI and AES routines for achieving some tasks that aren't possible from ST Basic, such as examining the position of the mouse and the condition of its buttons.

The final chapter gives short reviews of some ST software that has most interested the author. This and the first chapter, can be regarded as nothing but padding, which is the last thing that this helpful book needs. Nevertheless its information is presented in a clear and helpful way, with plenty of examples, and it is heartily recommended. I look forward to other productions for the ST from Compute!



ATARI ST

Power Without The Price!

FREE SOFTWARE

When you buy one of the new Atari ST computers from Silica Shop, you will receive a large and varied software package free of charge. This package covers several applications and comprises a total of nine titles. All STs now have TOS/GEM on ROM, and the total list of free software is as follows:

- 1) GEM - DR Desktop environment with WIMP (in ROM)
- 2) TOS - Travel Operating System (in ROM)
- 3) 1st WORD - Word Processor by GST using the GEM environment and multiple windows
- 4) BASIC - Personal Basic by DR (with manual)
- 5) LOGO - Logo language by DR (with manual)
- 6) DODDLE - Simple paint/doodle drawing package (works on mono or colour systems)
- 7) MEGARIDS - Asteroids type game by Megamax
- 8) NEOCHROME - A powerful colour paint and graphics package (only useable with colour systems)
- 9) CP/M EMULATOR - Allows the use of DR's Z80 CP/M software to run on any ST system

3rd PARTY SUPPORT

The power and potential of the ST range of computers is causing a flood of new software titles, peripherals and accessories from third party manufacturers. Titles range from word processing to spreadsheet programs, from graphics and games to database management - all with those easy drop-down menus and windows. With the list of companies producing ST software including dozens of top names, you can expect some first class titles for the new ST range. The following includes a selection of the third party manufacturers who have developed, or are working on, products for the ST range:

ABACUS	EXTENDED S/W	MICRO-INC	ROBINSON STS
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ACCOLADE	FIRST BYTE	MICROPROSE	SIERRA ONLINE
ACTIONS/ST	FAST PUBLISH	MICROPRO ENG	SM SOFTWARE
ACTIVISION	FILE FILE	MICROGRAPH INC	SOFTX
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BAWNEY	ISLAND LOGIC	ODIN	SUNDATA SERVICES
BECKMEYER	KNOWLEDGEWARE	ODIN	SUNSHINE BOOKS
BETTER WORKING	LOUISIANA	ODIN	SUPPLEMENTAL
BLUE CHIP	LASTRACFT	ODIN	SYSTEMS
BOE	LEVER	ODIN	TALANT
CASILINK	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
CHANG LABS	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
CHESTER SYST	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
CHIPS/ST	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
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DELTHUM PRESS	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
DRAGON GROUP	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
DUPONT PUBLISH	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
ELECTRONIC ARTS	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM
EXECON	LONGHEART	ODIN	TELARUM

520ST-M

NEW 512K 520ST-M KEYBOARD: The new 520ST-M keyboard costs only £346.95 (+VAT £399) and is yet another price breakthrough for Atari Corporation. The keyboard now includes both an RF modulator and cable, allowing you to connect it to an ordinary domestic television set. In addition, the keyboard is supplied with 512K RAM, a mouse and a free set of 3 1/2" disks containing applications software. The TOS operating system and the GEM graphics package are now supplied on 192K ROM chips which are already installed in the keyboard. This means that the operating system will automatically boot in when you switch the power on. In addition to the keyboard, you will also need to purchase either a 1-Mbyte disk drive (RRP £130 +VAT) or a 1-Mbyte disk drive (RRP £174 +VAT). Either disk drive will provide you with fast information retrieval and a vast amount of storage space. If you prefer not to use your own TV set, you may connect your ST to a monitor. You may purchase the Atari SM124 monochrome monitor (RRP £130 +VAT), or one of Atari's two Thomson colour monitors. Alternatively, you may choose one of the many third party colour monitors which are available.

NEW 1024K 520ST-M KEYBOARD: In addition to the standard 520ST-M, we have a new keyboard which we are calling the Atari 520ST-M+. This is a 520ST-M keyboard which has been enhanced by a third party RAM upgrade to 1 megabyte of memory. The 520ST-M+ is available from Silica at a retail price of only £439.95 (+VAT £499). This product will provide you with an alternative to the 1040ST-F, but at a lower price. Additionally, it features the advantage of the 520ST-M's built in modulator.

£347

1040ST-F

For the businessman and the more serious home user, Atari have introduced the 1040ST-F, a low cost powerhouse which can be introduced to a business environment as a stand-alone system, or can support a mainframe computer as a terminal. The new one megabyte 1040ST-F enhances Atari's value for money reputation in the marketplace as it is the first personal computer available with one megabyte of memory for less than £800. You can purchase the 1040ST-F as a monochrome or colour system. The price of the monochrome system is £799 (+VAT = £918.85). With the colour system at only £899 (+VAT = £1,018.85). The new 1040ST-F not only features twice as much memory as the 520ST-M, but also includes a one megabyte double sided disk drive and mains transformer, both built into the console to give a compact and stylish unit with only one main lead. The 1040ST-F is also supplied with a free software package. Unlike the 520ST-M, the 1040ST-F was manufactured solely with business use in mind and as such is supplied with a monitor. It does not include the RF modulator or lead. We now have stock of the 1040ST-F at all four branches of Silica Shop. Call into your nearest branch for a demonstration.

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THE ATARI EXPLOSION!

If you read the specialist computer press, you will have noticed that there is one company which is getting a large slice of editorial space at the moment, that company is Atari Corporation. Atari have been making the news since the launch of their new 16/32 bit range of ST computers. Led by the powerful figure of Jack Tramiel and under the banner 'Power Without The Price', Atari are manufacturing new computers at unheard of prices, with the power to challenge firmly established market leaders. With the introduction of IBM compatibility, a CP/M emulator, a powerful networking system and a communications package for their new low cost powerhouses, it doesn't look as if it will be long before there is an explosion of the magnitude which will see Atari placed firmly besides such names as IBM and Olivetti in the personal computer marketplace. Read on for more details of what Atari are doing, and how they are putting their 'Power Without The Price' computers beyond the reach of the competition.

FREE CP/M EMULATOR

This newly announced CP/M Emulation Package, will enable software written under Digital Research's Z80 CP/M operating system to be run on the ST family of computers. There are several thousand applications written for CP/M in the UK alone, and several of the major CP/M software development houses may convert their programs to 3 1/2" disk format for the ST range. The CP/M emulation package is supplied FREE OF CHARGE by Silica Shop with all ST computers.

IBM COMPATIBILITY

To make the ST available to those businesses who currently run IBM systems and are looking for a low cost expansion method, Atari have announced a co-processing unit for ST computers. This processor will open the ST range to all IBM or IBM compatible software applications. The unit, which attaches to the ST computers via the DMA (Direct Memory Access) port, contains an Intel 8088 processor with 128K of RAM and will accept a 9 1/2" disk drive. In its ST mode, the unit will also act as a second disk drive, offering the user an additional 500K of memory. The IBM co-processing unit should be available in late summer 1989. If you would like to be informed when it is released, please complete and return the coupon below. We will send you further details as soon as we have them.

20Mbyte HARD DISK

£739

The new Atari hard disk for the ST range has just been released. All ST computers already have a hard disk interface built into them so there is no external interface required. The memory size of the disk is a massive 20 megabytes (unformatted) with a data transfer rate of 1.33 Mbytes per second. At a price of £739 (+VAT £849), the 5 1/4" hard disk offers massive storage with fast access at a very reasonable price.

NEW ST SOFTWARE PACKAGES

There are now hundreds of software packages which have been announced for the Atari ST range. Titles available now include DB Man, a DBase 3 clone as well as H&D Base, a DBase 2 clone. In addition, PC Intercomm is a VT100 emulator which allows you to use any ST keyboard as a terminal connected to a mainframe or mini. Other programs include a Lotus 1-2-3 clone (see paragraph below).

VIP PROFESSIONAL - LOTUS 1-2-3 CLONE

This is probably the most impressive program to have been released so far for the ST range. VIP Professional is an extremely easy to use, integrated spreadsheet, database and graphics program which is identical both in features and commands to Lotus 1-2-3. The same spreadsheet analysis, information management and extraordinary business graphics are all combined in one easy to learn, affordable package. What's more, VIP Professional not only has all the features of 1-2-3, you can also type the same commands to do the same things. Probably the most surprising feature of VIP Professional is not its total compatibility with Lotus 1-2-3, nor its ease of use, but its price. Lotus 1-2-3 for the IBM PC/AT costs £395 (+VAT £454.25), whereas VIP Professional for the ST is a mere £169 (+VAT £194.35). That's less than half the price! If you would like further details, or VIP Professional, please return the coupon below.

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Atari 1040STF

that you can be sure you've gotten a thing

The Atari 1040STF employs state of the art 16/32 bit technology. Yet its price is unbeatable.

The ST range of computers already has a large number of software programmes available, including word processors, spreadsheets and databases, as well as a variety of programming languages and specialist business packages.

The 1040STF will also run software written on several other popular operating systems, including CP/M.

It has a 1024K RAM, integral 1Mb (unformatted) double-sided 3½" disk drive, two-button mouse and built-in power supply.

The operating system is in ROM, leaving RAM free for applications. BASIC and LOGO programming languages complete the package.

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As the American magazine 'Byte' commented, "for some time to come the 1040STF will be the clear leader in price/performance."

For the name of your nearest dealer, ring Teledata on 01-200 0200.

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 **ATARI**[®]
Power Without the Price™

The show that's worth seeing twice

By Peter Fellows



TAKE one Atari ST, one man with imagination, and add someone with artistic flair. Mix well with Degas and an *Atari User* Basic listing. Season with a tour round a warehouse – exciting stuff! – and a sense of humour. Cook for a couple of months and garnish with HippoArt. Result – a superb and professional presentation of a company's activities for a minimum outlay.

Clive Savigar, ST owner and director of Export Packers, a company dealing in freight forwarding, needed a method of attracting prospective customers to his stand at a forthcoming show. Slide shows can be boring and videos expensive, so when he saw HippoArt he thought: "What about a computerised slide show?"

We put him in touch with Kevin Bulmer, another ST user and an accomplished commercial artist. Kevin's artwork is popping up more and more in the computer press, and after a tour round their warehouse to see what freight forwarding was all about, he designed the pictures you see here.

Drawn with Degas, they were then converted to Neo format using the Basic program from a recent issue of *Atari User*. They could have been done with Neochrome direct, but Kevin prefers to work in Degas. The slides are then shown with HippoArt.

The crossfades and dissolves of this program make a really eyecatching and professional display, so much so that when the graphics were shown on a 27in Sony television in a Birmingham hi-fi showroom, the place came to a standstill! Experiment has shown that people almost invariably watch the show at least twice before moving on.

There is nothing new about computer presentations, but the ST's power and speed make eyecatching graphics easy. Throw the Haba colour digitiser into the recipe above and stand well back – you ain't seen nothin' yet!

Pictures drawn by Kevin Bulmer for Export Packers, Birmingham.



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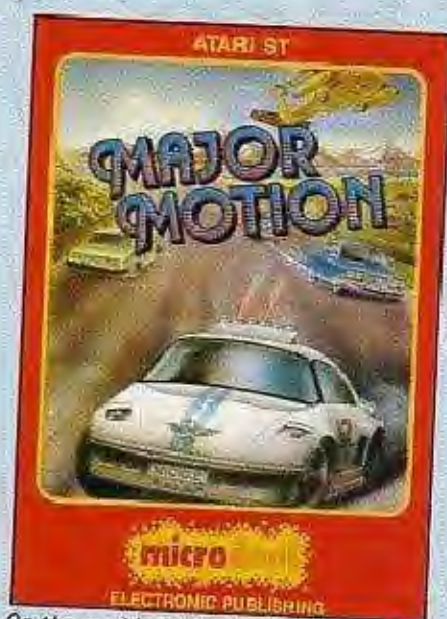
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IF you've ever played the arcade game Spy Hunter, you'll know what Major Motion is like. You play the part of a secret agent, driving a super powered racing car with all sorts of fantastic gadgets on board.

Imagine a cross between a James Bond car chase and Knight Rider, and you won't be far off. As you drop down the ramp from the supply truck, the battle commences.

You see the road as a plan view from above, rather than the pole position style windscreen view, and your task is to destroy the enemy Draconian vehicles, but not to harm any civilian cars.

To do this your car has built in machine-guns, but then the enemy also have some armoured cars, which are completely bullet proof. To destroy these you must ram them from the side until they crash into the verge.

Luckily for you, your company is busy developing enhancements for your super-car, and as the game progresses you can get more

equipment from the supply truck. These items include ground-to-air missiles (to attack enemy helicopters), oil and smoke-screen generators to hamper vehicles chasing you, a sonic boom device to drive other cars off the road, and a turbo thrust to leave the Draconians standing.

Each device is controlled from the keyboard, which you can customise to your own requirements.

Unfortunately if you crash, or are smashed off the road, you've got to re-supply your brand new car. As the game progresses you will have to negotiate icy roads and twisty bends, meet Batman and The Evil Twin – a prototype of your own car, and armed as you are – and even change to speedboats for a fast race up the rapids. You may even see Rambo!

The colour graphics (you do need a colour monitor) are spectacular, well up to arcade standards, and really do justice to the machine. The main title screen involves some 3D text rotation which is out of this world. The sound effects are quite good, although a little infrequent, with long periods with no sound at all.

The background music adds the final touch to the game, with the Mission Impossible and Batman themes setting the scene.

My only criticism of this otherwise excellent game is that there is no joystick option. The mouse may be useful for selecting files, but it is not really the best way to drive a car.

Most ST owners have joysticks as well as their mouse, so it seems a shame to spoil an otherwise fantastic game when the extra programming would be so negligible.

Even so, I still found the game very addictive, and recommend it to any ST owner who wants a decent arcade game to while away those midnight hours.



Sound:	8
Graphics:	10
Playability:	7
Value:	9
Overall:	9

Product: *Essex*

Price: £39.95

Supplier: Synapse and Broderbund, c/o Software Express, 514-516 Alum Rock Road, Alum Rock, Birmingham B8 3HX. Tel: 021-328 3585

IN the magnetic disc that carries *Essex* there lurks an adventure game with a difference, an electronic novel. To quote Synapse and Broderbund: "An electronic novel picks up where the printed word leaves off . . . we have discovered a remarkable new entertainment experience".

The program disc is packaged very insecurely inside the back cover of a hardback book. Its first chapters introduce the major characters, set the scene and lead into the adventure proper. Ninety five pages of introduction might put even the hardened adventurer off, but wait, what's this? There are only 35 pages of text, the rest being left blank for your own notes, some hidden instructions on page 89, and advertising for other "novels".

The book is a bit of a rip-off. Apart from setting the scene, which could just as easily have been done in the program, and justifying the title electronic novel, its main purpose seems to be as a security device for the game. Before you can start you are asked to type in a word from a certain page and line, the exact details of which change with each program boot. If you get the word right you can continue. If not, the program stops. It would be a commendable anti-piracy idea if only photocopying hadn't been invented.

The action in *Essex* takes place on board a colossal starship of the same name. Hideous Vollchon battle machines once more threaten the galaxy (what, you don't remember the last time?). Professor Klein has to be rescued and only Captain Dee of the *Essex* can do it in time.

You have to deliver secret papers to the elusive captain which, it is hoped, will convince him to help civilisation. You board a shuttle with various other people, including a midget with an inferiority complex, and a walking, almost talking lobster. These characters wander around the ship on a guided tour, generally getting in your way and saying silly things at inappropriate moments.

The game has a very sophisticated parser, and allows complex multiple word inputs. You can talk to anyone on the ship - crew members, fellow tourists, auto lifts and even your equipment - but little seems to help. Time is short, and you only have a limited amount of it before everything goes up in smoke.

Essex is intriguing, and difficult. I haven't managed to do anything except get thrown into the brig for impersonating an officer, let alone save the universe.

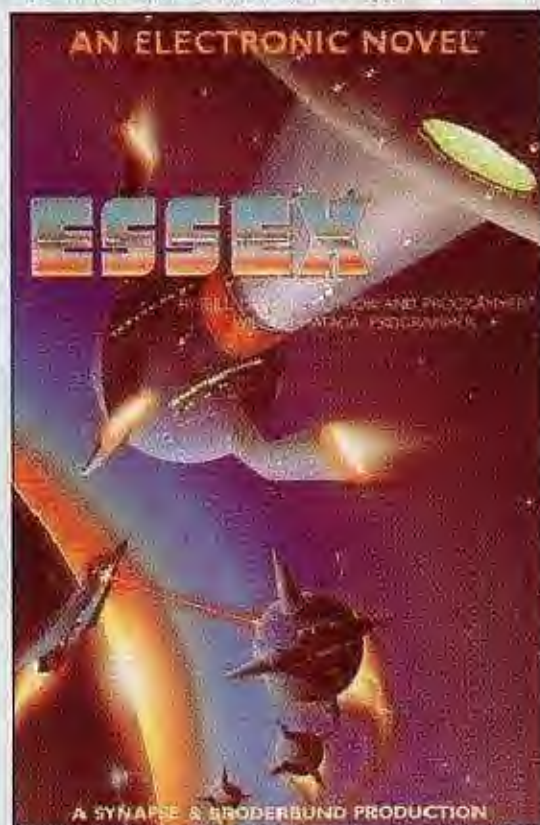
One gets the feeling that the other characters are wandering around independently, and that

A novel idea for starship experience

you really are on a working ship. Things happen around you, voices scream over the intercom, security guards stop people and search them. On top of all of this, the ship falls to bits.

Usefully, Synapse thought to include a time slow command, which slows the rate at which these disturbing events happen, and a save game option for those of us who need to cheat fate on a regular basis.

Essex's screen display is divided into two

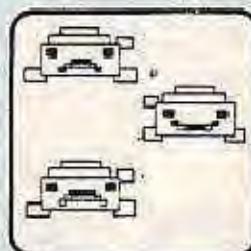


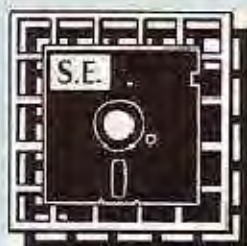
**Reviewed
by Jason
Kingsley**

sections. The upper is the result of your actions and a commentary on events, the lower your input screen. It looks a bit boring at first, but the descriptions and continuous frantic action make up for the lack of imagination in its presentation.

Whether *Essex* is a remarkable new entertainment experience is doubtful. That it is remarkable is true. The game is a very different adventure, with abstract problem solving played down and interaction with people brought to the forefront. If you hate crowds, forget it.

Sound	Not applicable
Graphics	Not applicable
Playability	8
Value for money	8
Overall	8



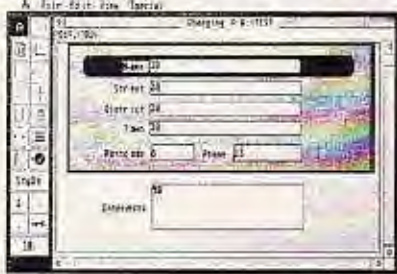




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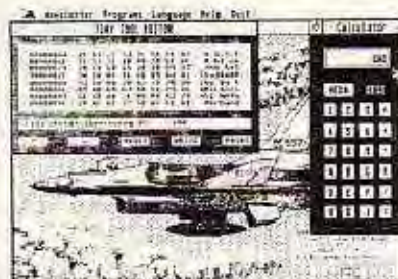
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Product: AS&T Starter System

Price: £995

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THE AS&T Starter System is intended for the business or serious home user. It is based on the Atari 520 STM, SM 124 mono monitor and standard software bundle, but with twin floppy disc drives and a printer added to form a complete working system.

All units are fitted with mains plugs, and tested before despatch. Even consumables are included, in the shape of a box of 10 discs and 2000 sheets of fanfold paper. The whole package comes at the attractive price of £995, which represents a saving of £265 compared with a similar system using the standard Atari disc drives.

Notable components of the AS&T package are the twin floppy disc drives, each of 1mb capacity unformatted. These very neat one-third height units are made by NEC of Japan, and are compatible with both single and double sided 3.5in discs.

They are whisper-quiet in action, which suggests that they are suitably gentle with your precious discs. AS&T have reduced the desk space required by mounting the disc drives in a bridge-like metal plinth, which stands over the computer keyboard unit and supports the monitor.

Cabling is reduced compared with the standard Atari components by connecting the very low power consumption drives to the external computer power supply. If you wanted to buy the disc drives separately you would send your power supply to AS&T for modification under their exchange scheme, which has a one day turnaround.

Owners of 1040s – which have internal power supplies – would require a separate power supply for these disc drives to avoid the need to open up the keyboard unit.

The printer in the Starter System is the MP-165 from Micro Peripherals, a leading supplier of both branded and own-brand machines. This is a nine needle dot matrix unit, capable of handling paper up to 10in wide, with tractor or friction feed.

It has a rated speed in draft mode of 165 characters per second, and is also capable of printing in near letter quality mode about a quarter as fast. It has a very complete specification, and can print European and Japanese characters at 12 and 17 characters per inch, as well as the standard 10.

It is even capable of proportional spacing when using a suitable word processor and printer driver, and of printing bit image graphics for screen dumps.

The printer is Epson-compatible, although this

Quiet drives enhance businesslike package



standard does not extend to the NLQ mode. It may be controlled largely via software, which is much more convenient than via hardware switches – whether on top or round the back – though these may also be used. The printer ribbon is also Epson-compatible, and hence widely available.

The system includes the standard Atari software – the word processor First Word, the programming languages Basic and Logo, and a painting program, Neochrome. The first is useful in the home or business, while the others afford opportunities for writing your own applications, and for relaxation.

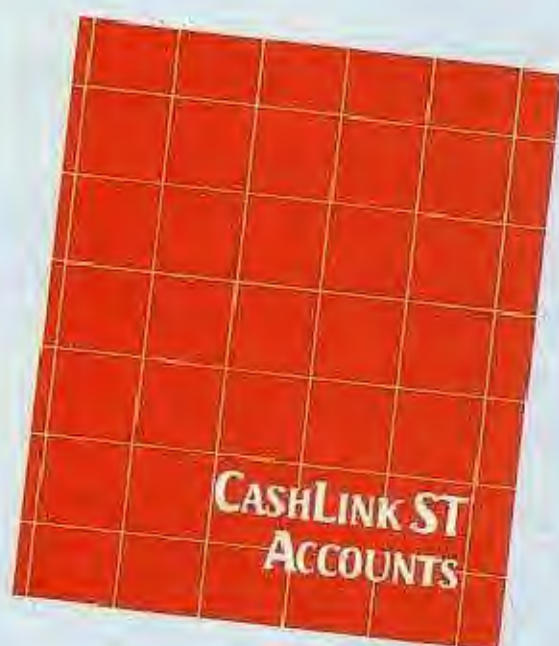
It offers the serious home and business user a complete system for word processing and more, while occupying a smaller desk area and costing significantly less than one using the standard Atari disc drives. It has ample scope for enhancement with new peripherals and software as user requirements change and grow. ■

Gordon Taylor reviews the AS&T Starter System





Reviewed
by Peter
Connors



A helping hand on the way to your first million

Product: Cashlink ST Accounts

Price: £295

*Supplier: Cashlink Software, Clogwyn Manor,
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Figure I: Main menu



Figure II: Interrupt ability is most useful

IF you're an IBM PC or clone owner Cashlink Accounts for the ST is as welcome as a bad cold. This accounting suite costs less than half the price of the PC or Apricot version, and runs three times quicker than on the IBM. So how much does it cost, and what does it do so fast? The first is a short answer – £295 + VAT – but the second really needs a book all to itself.

Anyone setting up a small business needs to keep accounts. You can get away with the back of envelopes for a bit if you aren't serious about making money, but the taxman catches up with you eventually.

If your turnover – the amount of money that passes through the business – is big enough to qualify for VAT registration then "eventually" becomes just three months, and customs and excise officers have been known to make midnight visits to offenders.

There is also a positive side to keeping the books straight because if you need money to expand then potential backers need to see accounts they can understand.

These figures tell them, and you, in what direction your business is heading – like a map, good accounts avoid commercial dead ends and abrupt falls. These accounts need to be recorded and presented in ways which fit in with standard accounting protocols.

All the transactions you make are entered in ledgers – not those big leather books any more, but disc files. Every transaction can be entered in a general ledger and this can be subdivided into headings like purchase or sales.

Purchases may have different VAT rates to be reclaimed from the VAT on your sales, which in

turn may have different discount rates for customers, each of whom will need sales printed on an invoice.

Every time you sell something the stock of that item decreases. If your stock of left-handed guzzengers drops then you need to reorder before you lose customers with that traditional saying: "I'm sorry, but we're right out of them at the moment". If sales are integrated with stock control then your customers shouldn't get nasty surprises like that.

Each month, quarter or financial year there will be demands on your accounts. Slow-paying customers may need another statement of what they owe, or even a final demand. The VAT may need to be worked out, or the Inland Revenue might want details of your employees' wages.

All that paperwork has to be printed out with the correct addresses and details. Even with a word processor, keeping track of all the bureaucracy in the correct formats involves a small business in laborious paperwork, often with only part-time secretarial and accounting assistance. Above all it is profoundly boring.

Cashlink Accounts comes to the rescue by doing all this and more from within one program on the ST - see main menu screendump in Figure 1. It needs a 520ST and a double sided drive as a minimum configuration. Both program and data can be held on one disc with this hardware line-up, but the bigger your disc storage the more accounts and stock items the system can handle.

If you need the hardware as well Cashlink Software supplies inclusive packages up to the 10mb hard disc level. Cashlink Accounts doesn't use Gem, but instead uses its own windowing system which makes it possible to examine one section of the accounts while suspending work on another.

This interrupt ability is available from pretty well anywhere within the accounting suite and is one of the most attractive aspects of Cashlink - see screen dump in Figure 2. From the main menu individual selections access sub-menus such as that for the general ledger in Figure 3.

For example, from behind your executive desk at the centre of the world's largest left-handed guzzenger business you may decide you need a profit and loss statement - an instant update on the state of your business - and in the middle of that you might wish to check that day's sales, and in turn you might want to make notes on them before you forget.

The latter is possible because built into all this is a Wordstar-compatible word processing program which makes notes, composes reports and letters, and even prints labels for your monthly statements to customers. Figure 4 shows the WP main menu.

Documentation is every bit as good as you would expect for the price. The sections are divided up in the same way as the screen menus, so it is very easy to find the information relating to a function.

Cashlink Software has also shown awareness

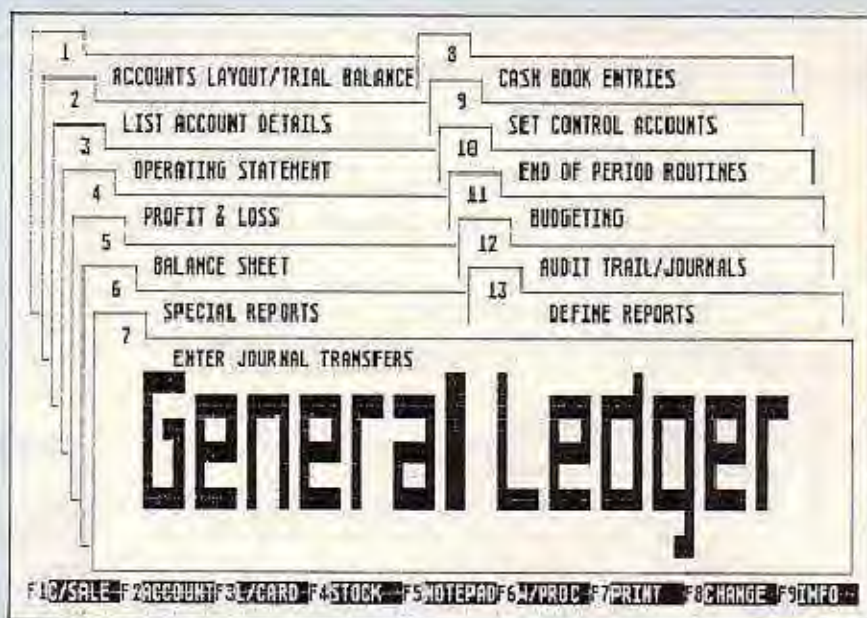


Figure III: General ledger sub-menu

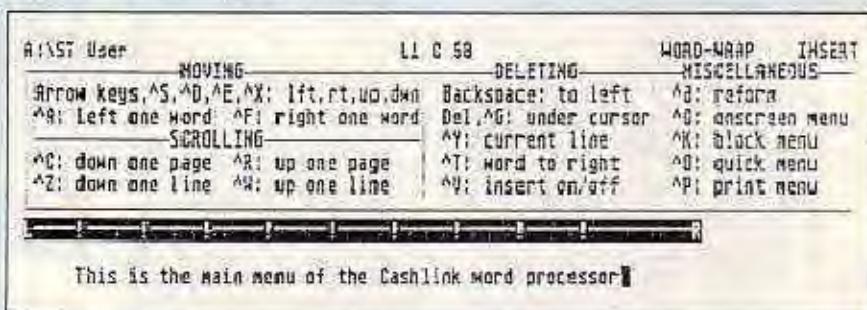


Figure IV: Word processor main menu

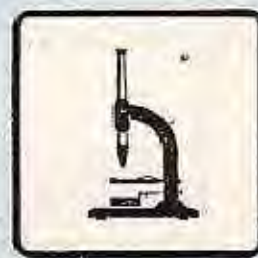
of the needs of the small business user by including a step-by-step tutorial section in the handbook, together with sample accounts. Anyone at a loss with accounting terminology will find all the explanations they want here.

Security hasn't been forgotten, and it is necessary to enter a code related to the serial number before the program can be run. Access to the ledgers is then controlled by different user-selected 13 character passwords for different parts of the accounts. If you really must use a password like 1234 then don't blame Cashlink if you find a mouse in the works.

So is it worth it? Even if you're a world expert on left-handed guzzenger marketing and don't actually sit down at a keyboard or calculator yourself the reductions in secretarial and accounting costs will soon be evident compared with an all-paper system.

If you run a one-man window-cleaning outfit those savings will probably take a long time to appear. However if you expect your business to grow rapidly - and we all dream - a computer-based system such as this is indispensable. After all nobody wants any hiccups on the way to the first million.

Ten million is a problem, however, because the largest figure Cashlink Accounts will accept is £9,999,999.99p. If that creates a serious difficulty for you there is only one answer - buy another ST.



MEGAMAX C FOR THE ATARI ST

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The MEGAMAX C is probably the best C development system available for the ATARI 520 ST. Already voted as the best C system for the APPLE Macintosh, the new ATARI package is even better, packed with even more features and now available at a very realistic price tag of just £137 (ex VAT).

- This package is a complete development system, not just the compiler and common IN/OUT library. Take the Graphical Shell for example. MEGAMAX fully supports all GEM routines (AES, VDI and DOS).
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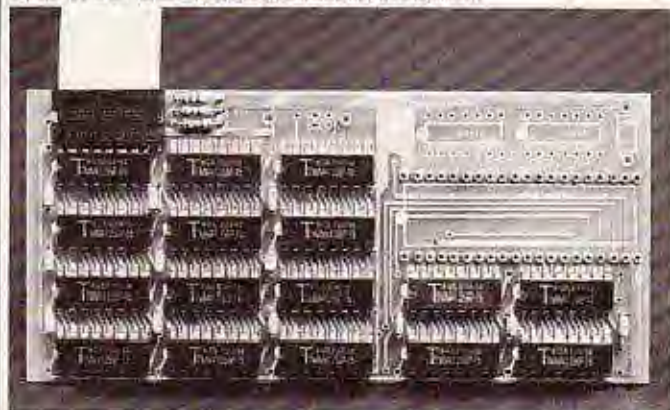
- Library source code Listings available.

- Subject to sufficient user support there will be a newsletter and additional library routine source disc service.

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NEWSLETTER

Help for the Boat People

MICROLINK is being used to bring hope to thousands of distressed Vietnam refugees living in the UK.

Their plight largely ignored, these former Boat People have become a forgotten multitude of have-nots crowded into substandard dwellings.

Their families are dispersed and they are unable to find work or obtain help from social agencies because of language difficulties and their ignorance of "the system".

But now MicroLink's telex and electronic mail services are easing cases of hardship by speeding the reunification of families and smoothing their path into Western society.

Many former Boat People are suffering because when they arrived in Britain the

authorities assumed that being Vietnam refugees they were automatically Vietnamese.

In fact three-quarters of them were ethnically Chinese, speaking only a form of Cantonese and unable to understand the Vietnamese instructors hired to teach them English.

As a result they were classed as incapable and illiterate and many suffered severe psychological problems as a result of their failure to adapt to British society.

Because of their inability to communicate they could not even obtain adequate help from social agencies and hundreds ended up in squats and dingy hostels.

Shunned by the ethnic Vietnamese, and even UK Chinese communities,

because they were considered inferior, the former Boat People faced a bleak future.

But a Chinese Vietnamese Advice Centre staffed by voluntary social workers has been opened in London to help them, and it is using MicroLink in its efforts.

Alf Jackson, one of the volunteers, said: "MicroLink's facilities will enable us to establish better communications with refugee agencies all over the world - particularly Hong Kong - and put dispersed families in touch."

"As well as the reunification of families, our work is concerned with improved housing for the refugees and their integration into UK society, for instance helping them set up in business".

CLIFF IS STILL TOPS

DESPITE what some critics might say the top show in London is the Cliff Richard musical *Time*.

At least that's the verdict of MicroLink subscribers according to the volume of bookings placed through *TheatreLink*, which is operated in association with renowned theatrical agency Edwards & Edwards.

Although *Time* has been panned by some of the critics it beats the long-running hit musical *Cats* into second place in the MicroLink theatre-goers' Top Ten.

In third place comes *Me And My Girl* - another of the eight musicals in the popularity list - followed by *42nd Street*, with *Starlight Express* in fifth place.

Another target for the critics, *Mutiny!*, comes sixth followed by perennial favourite thriller *The Mousetrap* and the comedy hit *Run For Your Wife*.

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Commonwealth link?

MICROLINK has been chosen as a potential medium of communication between the Commonwealth Secretariat in London and the organisation's 49 member countries.

A project is underway to assess various electronic mail and telex options in conjunction with the Secretariat's planned expansion of its computer facilities.

The aim is to improve the speed and efficiency of links between member countries and also with international

bodies like the United Nations' agencies and the World Bank.

The Commonwealth's own specialist databases will also be set up as part of the project which is expected to be completed in about two years time.

"MicroLink is one of two systems we are experimenting with at the present time", said Commonwealth Secretariat computer manager Peter Windle. "We have been impressed by its user-friendliness and ease of use".

H&D Base well worth the effort

HAVING been a Dbase II freak for a long time I awaited the arrival of H&D Base from Chester Holmes and Oliver Duckworth with the anticipation of a pools winner waiting for his cheque. Why the excitement? Ashton-Tate's Dbase products have become so commonly used that they are virtually industry standards.

The main reason for their popularity is the versatility given by the vast range of commands and the ability to execute these commands from a disc file just like a Basic program. Where an off-the-shelf database is insufficient, or would be cumbersome to use, Dbase II is often the answer. In fact a tremendous amount of applications software has been written in this command language, though often the users are unaware of it.

H&D Base, like Dbase II, is a relational database — that is, it can process information contained in several files which are related. Only two files may be in use at the same time, but these two files may be linked together so that movement within one file will result in a similar movement in the second.

The most efficient method of accessing a record is by means of indexes, and in this respect H&D Base is well-catered for, indexing on a single field or a combination of fields. Only one index may be in use at a time, but up to seven indexes may be open — and therefore automatically updated — when data is added, deleted or amended.

Commands are simple English-like words, and beginners should be able to create and use a database in a very short time. Basically, you may type **CREATE** filename and follow the prompts. I created a simple database for appointments, and the command **LIST STRUCTURE** would then display the database as in Figure 1.

The command **APPEND** then allows us to enter appointments into the database, and where repetitive data is common **SET CARRY ON** carries forward the data from the last record into the new. **EDIT** enables us to alter or delete the data already entered.

One delightful attribute of H&D Base is that deleted records are not actually removed from the database until the **PACK** command is issued and this can be a lifesaver.

Having entered the data H&D Base now comes into its own. For example, the command:

```
LIST FOR DATE="25/07/86"
      .AND. AM=T
```

will list all morning appointments on July 25. The

field AM has been set up as a LABEL field where it may only contain Y or T — for true, or N — for false.

Changing data en bloc may be done with the **REPLACE** command:

```
REPLACE ALL KEYWORD WITH "Fred"
FOR KEYWORD="Bert" .OR.
KEYWORD="I.C.I."
```

will change all of the appointments with Bert, or his company, to now be with Fred. These very simple examples give an idea of what may be done.

H&D Base has its own report generator which, while rather unfriendly, works quite well. It saves your report on disc as a text file which may be edited with the command file editor or reused as it is.

There is no limit to the number of reports you may have other than the obvious one of disc space. If you need something special you can always write it yourself and the tutorial will assist. The editor is a definite improvement over the Dbase II offering, which must be the worst I have ever used. H&D Base's editor, while primitive, is quick and efficient, though very large command files can be a problem.

H&D Base is written in Forth and has the unusual ability of making all of the 200 or more words in the Forth dictionary available to the user. In addition bindings into GEM itself have been supplied with documentation on the disc. The manual is exemplary and better than Dbase's own.

It says it is compatible with Dbase II command files, and programs ported over from an Octopus computer worked with only minor changes. The technical specifications of H&D Base are given in Table 1.

The first version of the program nearly gave me a nervous breakdown. It had a lot of bugs, one of the most infuriating being that all error messages were in colour. I have only a monochrome monitor and thus couldn't actually see them. A telephone call to the States brought an updated copy four days later curing most of the bugs, but the indexing still wasn't right and it was still prone to crashing without warning.

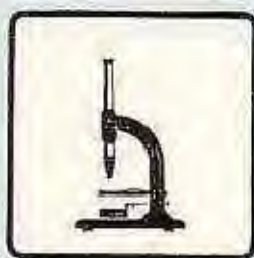
Finally the production version arrived at my dealer, and so I set to work in earnest. With each new version there were more examples and documentation. The current version now has a sample Gem application and also a set of



STRUCTURE FOR APPTS.DAT				
INDEX IN USE: NONE				
NUMBER OF RECORDS: 0				
PRIMARY SELECTED				
FLD	NAME	TYPE	LENGTH	DEC
01	KEYWORD	C	015	
02	DATE	C	008	
03	TIME	C	005	
04	AM	L	001	
TOTAL BYTES			00030	

Figure 1: The structure of a sample database

By
**SIMON
TERRY**



programs written as command files to assist the beginner in starting to use the program.

Program development, especially if you are using the Forth or Gem extensions, can still result in a crash but mercifully that is now infrequent. Shortcomings of the package are generally minor, but the error trapping could be better. The manual recognises that more error trapping will slow the operation, but a simple display of an errant program line when a program aborts would help debugging a great deal.

In terms of access speeds, fast it ain't. Use of a hard disc improves matters a great deal, and since hard discs at reasonable prices are imminent – by the grace of Atari – large customised databases running at reasonable speeds are eminently feasible.

The slow speed has a plus side however – the data files are remarkably secure. A power failure in the middle of an editing session resulted in the loss of only two records which were still in the disc buffer, the remainder of the file being perfectly intact.

The Forth commands appear to work, as do the Gem extensions, and I used the Gem sample supplied to operate as a shell for some of my own programs without much modification.

However to make the best use of these extensions some knowledge of Forth and preferably a Gem reference book would be

necessary. The Forth language gives access to the machine that Dbase II never had, opening a lot of doors to comms, networks, hardware – for example remote cash terminals – and of course graphics. The use of even the simple shell supplied gives the user the ability to run accessories, an ability not normally available in a non-Gem program.

Despite its idiosyncracies and the wealth of databases now available I use H&D Base more than any other. If you are prepared to spend some time learning how to use this product you won't regret it, and books on Dbase II should help the beginner – your dealer should be able to get them for you. H&D Base costs £99.95.

Maximum Specifications

Characters per field	254
Characters per record	2,000
Fields per record	97
Index key length (chars)	100
Records per file:	Limited only
	by disc space
Numeric accuracy	8 digits
Character string length	254
Command line length	254
Variables in SUM command	5

Table 1

Atari ST User

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EDWARD SHARK reports

ONE of the biggest selling points of the Atari range in the US lies in the plummeting hardware prices.

They have fallen to levels that are attracting a whole new generation of Atari owners who have leapt on the Tramiel "Power without the Price" bandwagon.

Atari continues to forge ahead with software for the best-selling ST, which is now outselling the Commodore Amiga many times over in the US, thanks to the recent return of the Amiga to its old price of \$1,600 (up by \$500 after a summer promotional deal).

Not to be outdone, Atari US is giving away a monochrome monitor to buyers of the 520ST and SF354 disc drive — that makes a mono ST system around the \$499 (£380) mark.

And 8 bit Atari owners shouldn't feel left out either, even if the UK Laskys chain has seemingly abandoned such owners, except for the 130XE which is still on display in downtown UK Laskys stores.

For \$99 (£66) you can get the 65XE machine, complete with four items of software, Star Raiders, Pacman, Donkey Kong and Skywriter, worth \$85. Not bad value.

The 65XE seems to be taking over from the Atari VCS games cartridge system in the US, which, despite resuscitation by Atari at recent US computer shows (more of which later), is still being shunned by increasingly mature games computer buyers.

Following the 65XE's tail is a \$399 (£265) package featuring the 130XE, disc drive and printer, along with the Atariwriter Plus word processing package and four other software titles — Music Composer, Star Raiders, Defender and Home Filing Manager.

Potential buyers have the

option of replacing the 130XE with the 65XE, for a \$349 list price. You might think that sounds a little too close for comfort to the above \$499 ST package, and you'd be right — some US dealers are shaving the 8 bit prices by as much as \$50.



Atari's leadership on the personal computing front was quite clear with their attitude at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago during June where they had the biggest and most prominent stand in the computer section.

The entrance was flanked by two special displays: "See the Power of Atari" featuring video digitisers, and "Hear the Power of Atari," with linked music synthesisers providing the aural sensations.

And no, we're not just talking about the ST here — the displays were divided evenly into 8 bit and ST products.

As with the PCW show in London last September, Atari rented a block of 36 stands from the show organisers and sub-let them to US software houses.

Again, half the displays were allocated to the ST and the rest to the 8 bit machines, perhaps representative of Atari's growing realisation that the public are a little worried that the firm may dump the 8 bit machines. Above all else, the message was clear at CES — Atari 8 bit machines are still alive and doing well.

On the ST software front several distributors chose CES as a stand to unveil or announce forthcoming software packages for the 68000 machine.

Batteries Included announced a wide range of ST

titles in the home and office category, including Thunder! their realtime spelling checker and I*S Talk, a terminal program with a whole host of features, including the spelling checker.

Microprose had Silas Warner, author of many top-selling computer games like Castle Wolfenstein and Robotwars, demonstrating Silent Service for the ST.

Baudville, Epyx, Firebird and Strategic Simulations were some of the software companies who announced expanded support for all Atari products at the show.

Several UK ST owners have complained of late that they are experiencing difficulty in getting connectors for standard monitors.

One international firm which specialises in mail order for connectors of this type, from DIY plug kits right through to custom connectors made to order, are At Your Service, 2856 Leechburg Road, Lower Burrell, PA 15068, or call 0101 412 335 4477 and ask for Mark Spires.

The latest release available from Atari US this month is DB Master One, an enhanced version of the program given away by US dealers last December.



Also available is DbMan, a dBase II clone with many extra features for the ST.

On the 8 bit front, Planetarium and Star Raiders II are beginning to make an appearance in US stores. Both titles were greeted very favourably at the CES and Comdex shows.

Baudville Inc has three new titles of home and

entertainment software, Video Vegas (blackjack, poker, fruit machine and so on), and Ted Bear's Rainy Day Games for young people. Contact them on 0101 616 957 3036.

Karate Championship from Epyx will keep the 8 bit machine owners happy with very realistic animation of martial arts, while for the ST Epyx are shipping Rogue and the revamped Temple of Apshai Trilogy.

They also plan to release Winter Games, World Games, Super Cycle and Championship Wrestling for the ST series in good time for in good time for Christmas.



I know many UK Atari owners have bought a modem for their ST, but are becoming frustrated by the dearth of good software available free for downloading on UK systems.

While uneconomic for browsing, two major BBS systems in the US are now open for free downloading of software for the price of an international phone call.

First is the official Atari BBS — Atari Base — which is available 24 hours a day at 300 baud or 1200 baud (full duplex) on 0101 408 745 5308.

Atari Base has more than 200 programs on line, all of which are available as public domain software, which, if downloaded at 1200 baud via an international phone call, can work out at about £4 to £5 per downloaded program, assuming cheap rate calls.

Another BBS in the US which offers a wealth of free software for the ST is the Haste BBS which is accessible at the same speeds on 0101 713 955 9532.

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